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ABSTRACT

This paper relates to a research project on the history and current practice of curriculum administration in Norway. An elaboration is provided on the changing high school system and the growing impact of curriculum scholarship on curriculum development. The discussion revolves around three objectives: (1) to determine if the newly formulated set of guidelines for curriculum development in the Norwegian high school represents a new paradigm of curriculum development practice; (2) to clarify in what way this new way of handling curriculum development is influenced by curriculum theory and curriculum research, and discuss the possible interdependence of research and practice evidenced by it; and (3) to question the justification for and the underlying rationale of the curriculum development guidelines. Appended are 32 references. (SI)

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HOW TO MAKE A CURRICULUM? THE 1987 GUIDELINES FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORWEGIAN HIGH SCHOOL - A NEW PARADIGMA IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE?

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Introduction: The Study

The paper relates to a research project on the history and current practice of curriculum administration in Norway.[1]
At present changes of a rather drastic nature, are taking place in the area of curriculum administration concerning both the basic 9-year school(ages 7-16) as well as the high school(ages 16-19).

Some key concepts in this connection are decentralized and locally oriented curriculum development.This implies a completely new strategy compared to the traditional centralized system of curriculum development and administration.

A relevant question pertaining to the apparent new strategy is why this strategy has been adopted and implemented, and if it really represents a change in the pattern of selecting, codifying and controlling the content of schooling.

The study aims at describing the historical development as well as the current practice focusing on the problem of curriculum administration. By the term" curriculum administration" is implied procedures related to the higher (state, political) levels of curriculum decision as they impinge upon lower curricular levels (regional, institutional, instructional) in order to implement and operationalize curricular intentions.

An approach including both historical and contemporary studies is chosen due to the assumption that an understanding of the historical context and continuity is a prerequisite for an understanding of the nature of contemporary curricular problems. The written curriculum documents represent a unique source as to the nature of influencing forces, competing interests, fights for control and contests over the content of schooling.An insight into the contemporary situation of curriculum administration remains incomplete without a historical perspective stressing the anteceding factors and preceding events.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the project is of two main kinds. On the one hand it relates to theory and research within the

field of curriculum history (see e.g.Englund,1986;Franklin, 1986; Goodson; 1983,1985,1987,1988; Gundem, 1986, 1989; Kliebard, 1987;Popkewitz, 1987).

On the other side it builds on theory derived from studies more specifically related to the question of state control and administration of schooling and curriculum(see, e.g.Lindensjö & Lundgren, 1986;Odin & Ahs,1986;Sabatier, ;Sannerstedt,1987).

The Contemporary Perspective and the Focus of the Present Paper

The present paper is related to two of the questions implied by the contemporary perspective of the main study :

1.Who does what in the area of curriculum administration today? What changes have actually taken place as a consequence of the curriculum reform of the last decades? Is the changing structures of administration signs of a changing pattern of control related to the content of schooling?

2. What is the rationale underlying the rhetoric and legitimation of present procedures and strategies of curriculum administration highligting especially local and decentralized curriculum development?

Focusing on the case study on which the paper more specifically is based, we may say that the objective of the paper is threefold:

1. To clarify if the newly formulated set of guidelines for curriculum development in the Norwegian high school(ages 16 - 19) represent a new paradigma of curriculum development practice taking into consideration that a set of guidelines like this one has never existed or been applied before.
2. To clarify in what way this new way of handling curriculum development is influenced by curriculum theory and curriculum research, and to discuss the possible interdependence of research and practice evidenced by it.
3. To question the justification for and the underlying rationale of the curriculum development guideline.

Data source and techniques

The main data source is the document in question, but also related documents and reports have been analyzed. It has especially been important to study reports from meetings of the expert group at work, and comments made by the different members during the process of discussion, planning and formulating the final product. It has been an advantage having the possibility of being present at certain meetings of the group and of discussing preliminary draft versions with individual members .

Some Background Information

Two sets of background information are important in order to understand the nature and scope of the questions involved: a changing high school system and a growing impact of curriculum scholarship on curriculum development.

A Changing Upper Secondary Education System and the Consequences for Curriculum Development

The 1974 Upper Secondary Education Act put an end to an elitist upper secondary education by making it cater for ninety per cent of the age group and turning it into a comprehensive school where the traditional academic subjects are in a minority, where integration(of special education) is sought implemented,and where the examination system is constantly under political debate.[2] .

Officially stated the overall aim of the reform was" to develop a school system offering a further three year upper secondary education to everyone on leaving the lower secondary school" (junior high school) ,giving the pupils the right to start at the level reached on leaving junior high school , that is on leaving the basic 9-year school.[3]

The structure of the high school changed drastically. From being an institution offering "general subjects" that is the traditional academic subjects, it now offers technical subjects, maritime subjects, physical subjects, commercial and clerical subjects, domestic science subjects, social work and health subjects, aesthetic subjects and fishing industry

subjects.

The curricular consequences were dramatic in the sense that the high school found itself confronted with a situation where most of its subjects had no "curriculum" in the traditional sense. For the greater part of the new subjects,there existed no written documents stating aims, content,methods and assessing procedures, a curriculum design that was agreed upon in 1976. Due to a very complicated system of options, the high school is at present in need of a set curriculum for approximately five hundred different subjects. Curriculum development has become one of the most important tasks of the state upper secondary school administration.

And it has been agreed upon a decentralized system of curriculum development ensuring a national curriculum. A group in Tromsø may e.g. be endorsed with the task of developing a curriculum for biology, while a group in Bergen is preparing a curriculum for domestic science. At the moment it is estimated that a hundred curriculum groups are in action.

In a situation like this the question of how to make a curriculum becomes imperative. Realizing that most of the groups would be comprised of subject teachers with no experience from curriculum work, it was agreed that the answer was to develop a set of guidelines prescribing how to go about the task of making a curriculum. A preliminary version existed from 1984. In 1986 it was , however, decided to call upon expert advice, that is "curriculum professors", to cooperate with the curriculum authorities and representatives from High School Teacher Training Institutions in developing such a set of guidelines. A preliminary version has existed from 1987, and in January 1989 a final version materialized from this "expert" group."

An Impact of Curriculum Scholarship

What made it possible to envisage some kind of cooperation,is what we may characterize as a growing importance given to curriculum studies as part of the graduate and postgraduate programs in education at the Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo, catering for a generation of curriculum specialists trained in curriculum theory and research, and also

in the techniques of curriculum making.

Especially the last years have seen an influx of alternative thinking adding to the classics like Tyler (1949), to German curriculum theory (Weninger ,1930, 1965; Klafki,1963, Heinemann 1962,1972; Schulz ,1972, Blankertz,1968, 1974) to alternative approaches(Stenhouse 1973; Eisner 1985),and to more recent approches like Goodlad(1979). The new influx is especially represented by Schwab's "practical", reconceptualists (e.g. Giroux. 1985) and curriculum theory derived from curriculum history like the writings of Kliebard and Goodson.

The point of interest is the influence exerted through these "professors of curriculum" to the "Guidelines for Curriculum Development"- an influence made possible by the integration of two "curriculum professors" in the group of eight preparing for the "Guidelines" , where the rest were "practitioners".

The Guidelines Document - an Outline

The small booklet of about twenty pages have two main sections: 1.How to develop a curriculum for a school subject and 11.The curriculum design of a school subject.

The first section starts up by addressing itself directly to people who is going to become involved in curriculum development work. The term "læreplan" meaning literally "a plan for what is to be learnt" is defined as a general prescribed curriculum in the service of curriculum planning. Stressing the importance of the Why, What and How of curriculum, a general line of advice is given:

> The curriculum of school subjects will influence the content of schooling and consequently the education offered after the basic school.
> That is why it is important to use adequate time to discuss both the decisions you take as part of your curriculum work and the possible consequences of these decisions for the high school.When you take decisions about what to include in the curriculum,you must counter balance the considerations of the preconditions, interests and needs of pupils, the manifest demands of society regarding the high school and

the tradition, nature and development of the subject .

(p.1 My translation)

On the following pages curriculum development in the high school, is related to its legal basis (the 1974 Upper Secondary Education Act),the rule and regulative system,and the administrative and educational structure of the high school.

The next pages of this section of the document is devoted to clarifying the controlling and steering role and function of a set curriculum,to describe and explain the nature and structure of a "subject curriculum" ,stressing especially the interactive implications of the different elements: overall aims, objectives, frame factors,teaching content, teaching methods, assessment and teacher competance and the preconditions of students.

What comes next is rather puzzling.Under the heading "Målstyring" which is in fact "management by objectives",one is informed that the "Ministry" has stated that it is desirable that mangement by objectives should be applied to curriculum work. That implies deduction from overall aims and goals to objectives at different curricular levels.

Section 11 is devoted more or less to clarify , explain in detail, and exemplify what is meant by the different elements of curriculum: objectives,content, teaching and learning methods, assessment and teaching aids.

An interesting point is that it is stressed that in developing a curriculum for a school subject,one should always start by a General Information Chapter where among other information, the reasons for including the school subject in the school curriculum should be explained. Justification and legitimation is considered important as a starting point for curriculum development . And it is judged necessary to communicate this justification to the teachers who are meant to implement and operationalize the curriculum as part of their teaching.

Discussion

In the following disccusion we are returning to the objectives that initially were put forward as a focal point of the paper:

1. To clarify if the newly formulated set of guidelines for

curriculum development in the Norwegian high school represent a new paradigma of curriculum development practice

2. To clarify in what way this new way of handling curriculum development is influenced by curriculum theory and curriculum research,and discuss the possible interdependence of research and practice evidenced by it.

3. To question the justification for and the underlying rationale of the curriculum development guideline

A New Paradigma of Curriculum Development

It may seem a tautology to claim that a drastically new approach in curriculum development represents a shift of paradigma in curriculum development practice.It certainly represents a shift of strategic procedure on the part of the centralized official curriculum authorities."The Guidelines For Curriculum Development in the Norwegian High School" is by now an official document, formally acknowledged by the National Board of Upper Secondary Education and the Ministry for Church and Education as a steering instrument for all curriculum development work .It remains , however, to see if it will become an integrated part of curriculum development practice.

For it seems that the same assumptions underlying a belief that innovation invarably follows new curricula, applies to the case .There exists on the part of the official curriculum authorities a tacit assumption that when the members of the curriculum group grasp the rationality of the Guidelines, they will apply it.

The fact that the "subject consultants" of the Secretariat of the National Board of Higher Secondary Education are reluctant to advice the different working groups to use the Guidelines and that some are even trying to prevent the use of it, tells, however, another story.Some are honest enough to tell that it is too difficult and more or less incomprehensible to them, let alone to the ordinary school teacher.And the curriculum development groups consist of ordinary school teachers with no training in or understanding of curriculum theory and curriculum work.[5]

The Influence from Curriculum Scholarship and the Interdependence of Theory and Practice

In many ways the Guidelines represent "gefundenes Fressen" for a person wanting to trace the influence of curriculum scholarship. There is no doubt that the document is "waterproof" as to soundness, rationality and comprehensiveness in curricular matters.

All the ABC's of curriculum development is included. The tradition of the curriculum of the high school vouches for the discipline oriented design, as does the complex pedagogical and administrative structure and organization of higher secondary schooling referred to earlier in this paper.It is ,however, a point of interest that the expert group wanted the term "læreplan for et fag", (the curriculum for a school subject) to replace the traditional term "fagplan" (subject guidelines). The argumentation being a wish to communicate the curricular complexities implied by the term "læreplan". The National Board of Upper Secondary Education decided , however, against, restricting the term "læreplan" to be used as a general term implying the whole curriculum of the high school.

There is in the Guidelines a strong emphasis on the structure of a curriculum implying a set of interrelated elements.The elements are the commonplaces of curriculum in a traditional sense: aims/objectives, content,teaching methods, teaching aids and assessment/evaluation.There is nothing especially new in the way these commonplaces are clarified, explained and exemplified. The explicit implication of interaction between the different elements are, however, significant for an approach away from a traditional aims - means rationale in curriculum planning.This impact may be traced to an interactive model for curriculum planning and evaluation, "didaktisk relasjonstenkning" developed at the Institute for Educational Research at Oslo University (Bjørndal & Lieberg,1974).

The rationale behind the model is that curriculum planning

may take as its starting point any of the commonplaces or curriculum elements.Certain objectives imply specific methods and certain teaching aids may have consequences imcompatible with certain objectives.It is insisted that an awareness of this implication permeates curriculum development work. The model echoes thinking from German curriculum theory (Heimann,1962,72; Schulz 1965) .

Embedded in the model is also the preconditions of curriculum planning and teaching. The general aims and goals of upper secondary schooling is an overall perspective.Student and teacher preconditions/prequalifications and "frame-factors" are, however, integrated in the model.The influence from Swedish frame factor theory is unquestionable (Lundgren, 1977)

It is , however, a fact that the evidence of curriculum as a sociatal phenomenon and not only as an educational document is rather insignificant. The relationship of the curriculum as a whole and as curriculum for subjects to the overall aims of upper secondary schooling is, however, broadly elaborated.Intentions on the part of the expert group to use the conceptual system of Goodlad to clarify the scope and nature of curriculum problems was repudiated and never realized.To introduce expressions like the"sociatal, substantive and professional/technical domains" of curriculum alongside terms like the "ideological , formal, perceived, operationalized and experienced " curriculum , was deemed to create estrangement , in any case bewilderment and therefore dropped as an impossible project.

The importance of a given curriculum and the complexity of curriculum problems and of curriculum development is underlined explicitly and indicated implicitly. . The passage quoted from the first page is an example.An underlying assumption is that a stated curriculum plays an important role influencing the content of schooling.An other assumption is that this is not always paid enough attention to. An immediate rationality is not taken for granted. That is why the art of deliberation and of problematization in the Schwabian sense is pointed to as a strategy.

The influence of Schwab is also evident in stressing the "equality of commonplaces" even if the commonplaces mentioned,- the individual child's wants or needs, the communal-political

considerations and the subject matter considerations,are more in the spirit of Tyler than of Schwab. The necessity to counterbalance the consideration in a conscious and explicit way points , however, to "arts of the practical."

And so to the question of the interdependence of theory and practice evidenced by the Guidelines for Curriculum Development.

As already mentioned, the expert group preparing the Guidelines was composed of two or three "curriculum professors" as well as lecturers in education from different high school teacher training institutions .Deliberation and especially negotiation as to the content of the Guidelines was a marked phenomenon of the development process especially as curriculum theory was discussed for inclusion in the document.And in many ways the more down to earth experience of the college teachers contributed to the final version in many ways.

It may be argued, however, that people from curriculum praxis were wanting. The people who are going to use the Guidelines were not represented in the group.And that has made a clash with the practical reality inevitable.That applies to the people in the Sekretariat of the Upper Secondary Board as well as to local teacher groups involved in curriculum development.

The Underlying Rationale

The third objective of the paper as stated in the introduction , is to question the legitimation and the rationale underlying the rhetoric of the new strategy, and discuss the possible interdependence of research and practice evidenced by it.

It seems that the rhetoric of the new strategy is linked to two interrelated phenomena of a political and sociatal character: The highlighting of local and decentralized curriculum development, and the implementation through "management by objectives". A series of explanations may be suggested as to why local curriculum work and decentralized decision making is put forward.

"Giving teaching back to teachers" may be caused by a sudden realizing of the long unheeded professional capacities of the grassroot teachers (Stenhouse 1973, Ulstrup Engelsen,

1988). It is , however, more likely linked to a growing awareness that "teachers will not and can not be told what to do", and that

> "...teachers must be involved in debate, deliberation, and decision about what and how to teach. Such involvement constitutes the only language in which knowledge adequate to an art can arise. Without such a language, teachers not only feel decisions as impositions, they find that intelligence cannot travers the gap between the generalities of merely expounded instructions and the particularities of the teaching moments (Schwab, 1983).

From such a point of view, local curriculum development and decision making as a state policy may result from the negative experiences with the top-bottom curriculum implementation strategies of the sixties and seventies. And the new strategies may be a demonstration of the limitations of political control and power related to matters of curriculum and schooling (Lundgren & Lindensö, 1986).

In the light of severe attacks on the present state of affairs in the high school, and combined with "management by objectives" decentralized and local orientated curriculum decision making mirrors the strains of accountability and the efforts to increase effectiveness and result orientated learning activities . As such the strategy may be looked upon as another gimmick to increase and sustain control over what happens in schools.

Conclusions

What is the scope of curriculum practice? There is a tendency to think of curriculum practice first and foremost as the practical realizing of curriculum at school and classroom level.In discussions about definitions of curriculum the dichotomy of curriculum as "fact" and as "practice", or the intentional and realized curriculum is often maintained (Goodson, 1988). An important domain of curriculum development like curriculum practice is easily overlooked.

In the present case study the curriculum practice

represented by curriculum development is focused leading to certain conclusions.

In several ways the Guidelines represents a completely new way of tackling curriculum development as curriculum practice prescribing new ways af handling curriculum problems and issues. That does not mean, however, that operationalization follows automatically.

It is also possible to conclude that there has been a strong influence from both theory/research and from praxis, denoting the context of schooling . The theory presented and used in the Guidelines is electively chosen in a way that would not have been possible if "curriculum professors" had not been part of the group.

The way the "theory " is presented and applied is modified by the fact that the representatives from "practice" being part of the group made sure during the process that the theory chosen matched the level of understanding and the particularity of the situation .

It is therefore possible to conclude that the case study being presented gives evidence of the possibility of interaction between people representing a theoretical point of view and people representing a practical situation in front of curriculum issues.What is especially demonstrated is the interdependence of theory/research and practical experience. The result would not have been possible without the theoretic insights of the "curriculum professors" nor without the practical experience of the teachers/administrators involved.

Still the document is in many ways too theroretical in the eyes of the potential users. And it is possible for members representing praxis to abstain from using it underlining the fact that "curriculum belongs to society and not to the curriculum professor".

This fact is highligted by the political and ideological undertones of the rationale behind the new strategy.

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NOTES

1.Gundem, B.B.:The History and Current Practice of Curriculum Administration in Norway. Project Description.University of Oslo: Institute for Educational Research, November 1988 Research project supported by the Norwegian Council for Research in Science and the Humanities/Program for Educational Research.

2. A proposal in 1988 from the Minister of Church and Education to ensure that no pupil should fail the final upper secondary examination, was, however, turned down.

3.For a fuller description , see OECD Reviews of National Policies for Education. Background Report on Norway. Oslo - Norway: Royal Ministry of Culture and Science, Royal Ministry of Church and Education. Preliminary Version, November 1987

4. Retningslinjer for utarbeiding av fagplaner i den videregående skolen.Rådet for videregående opplæring.Januar 1989. 1.opplag 9.1.1989 (Guidelines for the development of curricula for school subjects in upper secondary education, The National Council for Upper Secondary Education)

5. Graduate students from the Institute for Educational Research are doing research work attached to the implementation of the Guidelines. The remarks are based on their information.